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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

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T. S. N. D. A. Department of Agriculture
Thursday, January 5, 1933

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "More Facts to Help You Read the Label." Information from the Federal Food and Drug Administration, U.S.D.A.

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Well, Sister Homemakers, the mail a few days ago brought a letter that asked a question some more of you may be asking later on. I couldn't answer the question. But I referred it to Dr. W. B. White, the chief of the Federal Food and Drug Administration's food control unit. So today, we'll have the question and then we'll have the answer. The question came from one of our circle of homemakers who want to know the facts about the food they buy for their families. This lady wrote that she had bought a can of cherries bearing on the label these words, "Below U. S. Standard, Good Food not High Grade." The lady was somewhat puzzled by the meaning of these words. She asked how food could be below U.S. standard and still be good food. She said that the cherries were not wormy and seemed to be in good condition.

Well, as I said, I sent her question along to Dr. White. Of course, I knew already that the label on that can was in compliance with the amendment, passed in 1930, to the National Pure Food Law, but I could not tell the lady all the ins and outs of the regulations that have been promulgated by the Food and Drug Administration as an aid in enforcing that amendment to the Food and Drug laws. So I asked Dr. White for an explanation knowing that all my listeners would be interested. And here is his explanation:

"Here is the story behind the question asked by your correspondent: On July 8, 1930, the President signed an amendment to the National Pure Food Law. Very briefly, that amendment authorizes the Secretary of Agriculture to establish and promulgate definite standards for canned food products -- excluding only meat and meat food products and canned milk. The amendment further authorizes the Secretary to establish a form of labeling for canned foods coming within the jurisdiction of the amendment which fall below the standards promulgated.

"Up to the present, the Department of Agriculture has established standards for 6 canned foods -- tomatoes, apricots, cherries, peas, peaches, and pears. It also has specified that the words, 'Below U. S. Standard, Good Food not High Grade,' must appear on the labels of canned fruits not coming up to the standards established; and the words, 'Below U. S. Standard, Low Quality, Not Illegal,' must appear on the labels of canned vegetables not coming up to the standards.

"Now, let's go back to the question which your correspondent asked. That was a good question. She wanted to know why a canned food could be below U. S. standard and still be good food. She said that the cherries she purchased were not wormy and were in good condition. Of course they were. If they had been wormy or unwholesome, it would have been illegal, under the

Pure Food Law, for the manufacturer to have shipped them interstate and the cherries would have been seized by the government.

"But, above the line which determines whether canned foods are good food or bad food, whether they are legal or illegal, there is a wide range in quality. So, then, the legend which the woman found on the can of cherries meant merely that the fruit departed from the standard of excellence announced by the Secretary. The fruit may have departed from the requirement in being of small size, not uniform in size, 'lean' or unsightly, or it may not have been put up in the conventional packing medium, sugar solution. Now none of these defects is a really serious departure from what you expect in good food. But any of them makes the product less attractive and less suited to table service in the average home.

"So the purpose of the amendment and of the regulations for its enforcement which caused that label to be put on the can of cherries your correspondent bought is to make it possible for the buyer to know that she is not getting the most attractive and appealing canned food when she buys goods labeled with the standard legend. So far as wholesomeness and legality of the food is concerned, she can feel perfectly safe in buying canned fruits and vegetables bearing the substandard legend, but she will know in advance that the foods within the cans are not of high quality. She can feel sure that if the food were a menace to the health of her family, it would be classed as illegal under the Pure Food Law and removed from the market."

Now that is Dr. White's reply to the question about the meaning of that label -- "Below U. S. Standard, good food not high grade," that you may encounter on cans of cherries, or peaches, or pears, or apricots and the other label, "Below U. S. Standard, Low Quality, not Illegal," that you may find on some cans of tomatoes and peas. The point about them is that you should be able to buy these cans of food at lower prices than other cans of food of the same kind and size, and that, while you'll find the food in the can to be wholesome, it will not be of high quality.

Dr. White asks that I add to this information the further fact that standards for other canned goods will be drawn up and announced to the public and the canning trade as rapidly as the facilities of the Department permit. It is going to be a whale of a job for the few experts who are doing this work to cover the vast range of canned goods which come within the jurisdiction of the amendment. Necessarily, progress will be slow. But the canning trade and the Department of Agriculture are convinced that enforcement of this amendment to the Pure Food Law will be of great benefit to housewives and to consumers generally. I know the Food and Drug Administration in the Department of Agriculture will be interested in having reports from you on your experiences with foods labeled under the provisions of the Act.

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Tomorrow: "Sunday night Supper."

